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GRAY MOLD DISEASE OF FICUS

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The gray mold disease caused by Botrytis cinerea Pers. was first described over 200 years ago (1). It is generally considered to be of a saprophytic nature and in this capacity has a very extensive host range. Under favorable environmental conditions this fungus can be pathogenic and destructive. The various types of injury caused by Botrytis are fruit rots, stem cankers and rots, neck and bulb rots, leafspots, tuber and root decay, and blossom blight. The fungus survives in the soil and on plant debris, the main sources of inoculum. However, the spores of this fungus are airborne.

The gray mold disease of Ficus elastica Roxb. (rubber plant) can be a serious problem in Florida. High humidity, poor air circulation, low light intensity; warm temperatures, and presence of free moisture are conducive to the rapid and frequent sporulation of this fungus (2).

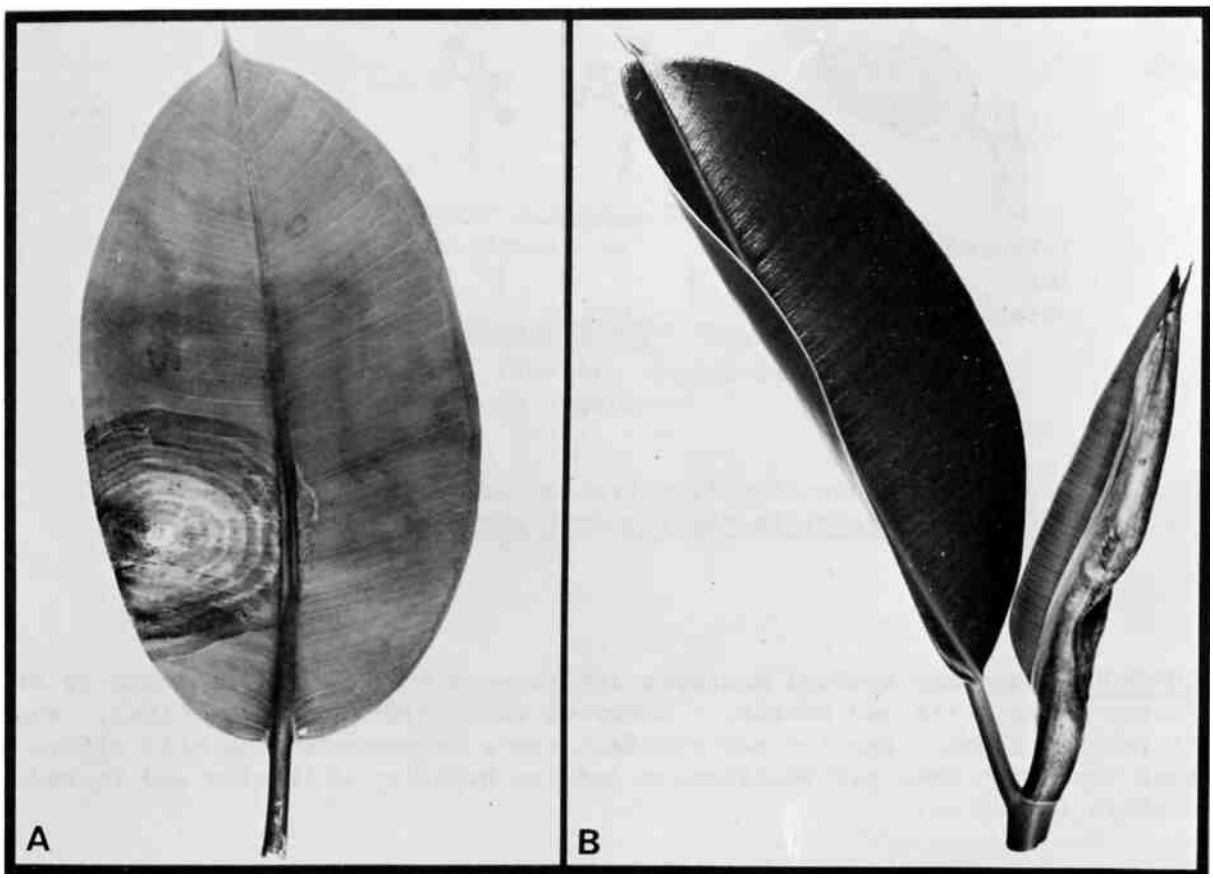

Fig. 1. Botrytis cinerea infection on leaves of Ficus elastica, showing leafspot with concentric rings (A) and growing tip (B) with infected leafsheath and newly emerging leaf.

SYMPTOMS. Under favorable environmental conditions, typical leafspots occur as light tan to brown lesions with concentric rings (Fig. 1-A). Growing tips develop necrotic lesions between the leafsheath and newly emerging leaf (Fig. 1-B), an especially ideal moisture-containing area for spore germination. Infected growing tips and leafspots can be initiated by aerial spores or by contact of healthy with infected parts of the plant (Fig. 2).

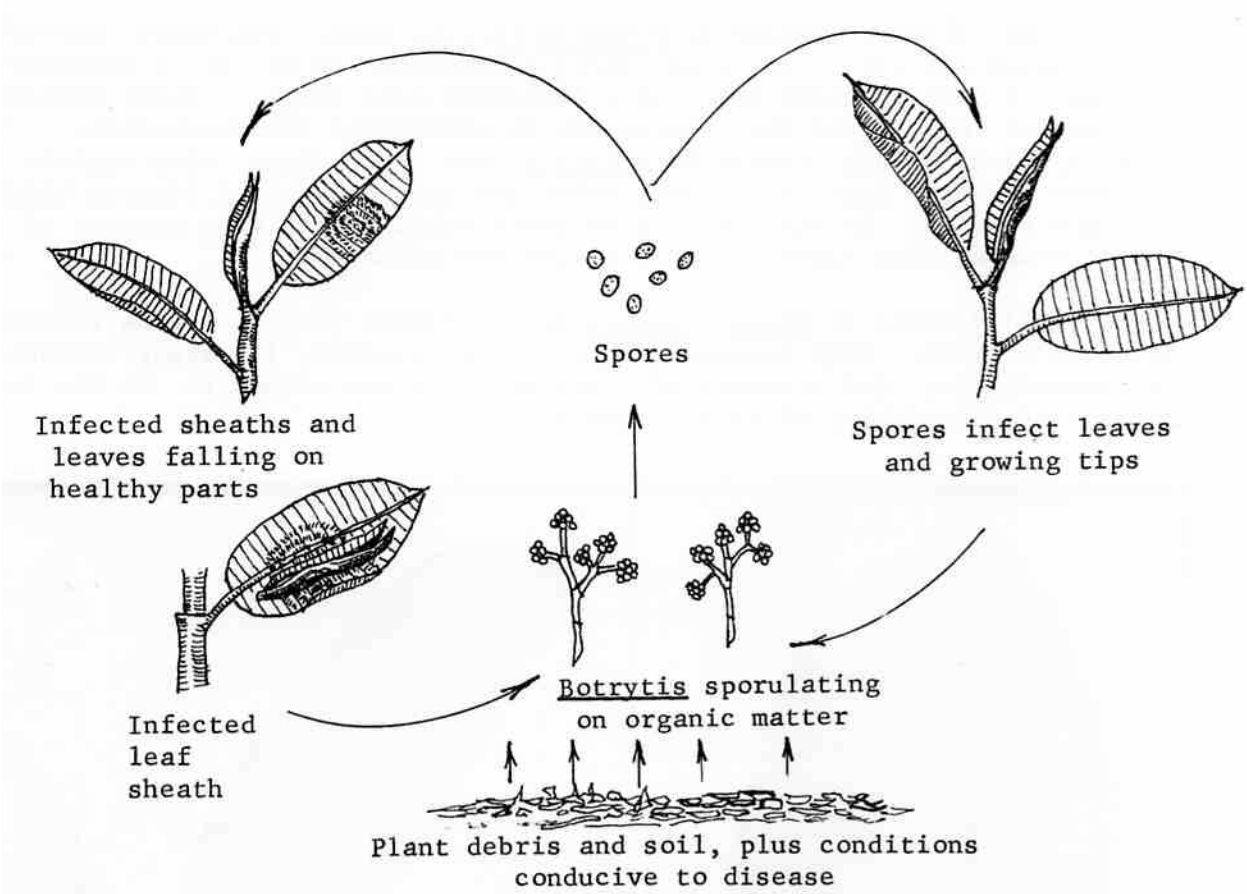

Fig. 2. Schematic illustration of the disease cycle of Botrytis cinerea on Ficus elastica.

CONTROL. Adequate control measures are secured by sanitation: clean-up of infected plant parts and debris. Spraying with effective fungicides, such as Botran and Zineb, applied per manufacturer's recommendations will afford disease control. Good air ventilation and low humidity will also aid in reducing disease incidence.

Literature Cited

1. Bessey, E. A. 1950. Morphology and taxonomy of the fungi. The Blakeston Co., Philadelphia. 791 p.
2. Forsberg, J. L. 1963. Diseases of ornamentals. University of Illinois. 208 p.